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STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD*

1. The International Year of the Family, the mid-decade goals for children and the World Summit for Social Development are comprehensive efforts that will benefit children and families - but which ones?

The poorest children: the primary reference

2. The United Nations, responding to the tremendous changes and uncertainties of recent years, has given increasing importance to its social and economic role. The International Movement ATD Fourth World, like many others, is pleased with this new emphasis on the human being as the focus of development. We particularly support the new concept of security based on respect for the dignity and self-fulfilment of each and every citizen.

3. The United Nations system has launched major initiatives in this new direction, setting ambitious goals for the well-being of children, devoting one year to the support of the family and mobilizing forces to redefine and promote social development. These initiatives are an opportunity to advance towards development and peace.

4. The issue of extreme poverty is very much present in all these efforts. Extreme poverty must, more than ever, be rejected as inevitable. The Secretary-General of the United Nations recalled this on 17 October 1993, on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty: "Extreme poverty and social exclusion are intolerable affronts to human dignity. The violence which they carry with them is devastating. Extreme poverty is far from inevitable: it is an unacceptable scourge".

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* An NGO in consultative status with UNICEF.

5. But in all these discussions and commitments to fight poverty, of whom will we speak? To whom will we listen and who will be heard? Which families will participate in this international year? What place will be given to the poorest among families, those who, because they endure so many cumulative insecurities in health, housing and work, have so much to say about the difficulties and the misery in which they live, but also about the efforts that they make? These are crucial questions for us.

6. For the International Movement ATD Fourth World and its numerous correspondents gathered at the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World, the children and parents who are the most crushed by extreme poverty are the baseline for efforts to promote social development and fight poverty. A global development that better protects the whole population and improves living conditions for all must be built on fundamental guarantees against extreme poverty and deprivation, with the poorest population groups serving as the basic reference.

Reaching the poorest: a choice and an obligation

7. If we are to seriously address poverty, reaching the poorest must be the primary objective of our projects and approaches. Twice, the Executive Board has adopted decisions in that direction, and again this year the report of the Executive Director devotes a few paragraphs to this issue.

8. The goal is certainly difficult, but none the less, essential. The medium-term plan for the period 1994-1997 (E/ICEF/1994/3) says: "Nor does it mean doing only that which is easiest. The universality of the goals for the decade and mid-decade obliges the organization to pursue, with its partners, the more difficult cases - the unreached, the poorest of the poor".

9. Surely, reaching the poorest means going further than the delivery of services to disadvantaged populations? The means must also be put in place to learn from these groups in order to involve them in a true partnership in the planning, execution and evaluation of the programmes. Reaching the poorest also means basing these programmes on the unceasing efforts already made by the poorest people themselves to resist extreme poverty.

10. As a follow-up to decisions 1989/8 and 1991/6, the UNICEF Evaluation and Research Office mandated the ATD Fourth World Movement in 1992 to carry out an evaluation on reaching the poorest. This study aims at identifying and analysing the conditions necessary for the participation of the poorest population groups in development programmes and will be completed in early fall 1994.

11. The ATD Fourth World Movement hopes that the conclusions of the study will contribute to the strengthening of efforts to ensure that the poorest children and their families are fully involved in development programmes and benefit from them, an objective particularly relevant to the upcoming World Summit on Social Development.

12. The ATD Fourth World Movement hopes that the UNICEF Executive Board will continue to devote time to the issue of reaching the poorest. We would also wish that the Executive Director continue in the coming years to report on the progress made towards this objective in his annual report.

Very poor families gather at the United Nations

13. In conclusion, we would like to draw the attention of the Board to the International Fourth World Family Congress, which will be held in October 1994 in New York on the occasion of the Year of the Family and the Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The Congress will gather poor parents and others who are partners in their struggle from approximately 40 countries on 5 continents. It will be an opportunity for dialogue and exchange with United Nations partners regarding the lives and experiences and the hopes and difficulties that confront today's poorest families.

14. Because of the central importance of children for poor parents - children whom they hope so much will not endure the same life of misery - the Congress will address issues directly linked to the UNICEF mission. Delegates who are preparing to participate in the Congress hope to have the opportunity to meet with UNICEF representatives on that occasion.